34 Years Ago at MSC

First mission termed 'clean and green'

Gemini Program gets off to a successful start

Reprinted from the April 15, 1964 issue of the Space News Roundup.

The first phase of the nation's second manned space program began like a storybook success last Wednesday as a Titan II rocket propelled a Gemini spacecraft into orbit in an almost perfect launching from Launch Complex 19 at Cape Kennedy.

As the unmanned, partly instrumented Gemini spacecraft went into orbit it brought enthusiastic responses from all responsible for the successful launch.

Gemini Program Manager Charles W. Mathews said the flight gave the Gemini team confidence to proceed toward a second unmanned flight and a manned orbital flight this year.

The second flight, set for late August or early September, is to hurl a spacecraft on a ballistic flight to test all systems, atmospheric re-entry and recovery.

Lift-off of the Gemini launch vehicle was only one second behind schedule, but a launching official claimed the range clock must have been wrong because the countdown was completed without even a one second delay.

The countdown started at 6 a.m. EST as planned.

High thin transparent clouds with a few puffy clouds were in the sky with winds of about 12-16 knots and the temperature around 80 degrees.

Lowering of the erector began at about 35 minutes to launch and observation aircraft around the area, some cutting contrails and others low enough to be seen, were there to observe the maiden flight of Gemini.

While the sleek black and white vehicle waited out the countdown, off to the right quietly loomed the pad 14 gantry from which the Mercury orbital pilots flew … the last flight, that of Cooper just 11 months prior.

NASA Photo 64-21560

OFF TO A SUCCESSFUL ORBIT— In a roaring lift-off amidst billowing orange clouds of smoke the Gemini-Titan vehicle leaves the pad at Cape Kennedy.

It all began precisely as scheduled when at 11 a.m. EST billowing orange smoke belched from beneath the Titan.

Three seconds later, the Titan lifted the spacecraft, slowly at first, then as acceleration increased, a liquid appearing flame trailed after the rocket. Smoke from the flame formed a perfect V beneath the rocket.

A rolling type roar (the noise was louder than the Atlas) that continued as the Gemini-Titan ascended, reached the press viewing site almost two miles away.

Paul Haney, MSC public affairs officer, announced four minutes and 30 seconds after launch, "Everything looks good, couldn't be better."

He made this statement as the spacecraft zoomed over Bermuda. Seconds later, Haney reported from the Mission Control Center, "It looks clean and green." At six minutes after launch word came that "Walt Williams just announced we have an orbit." Two minutes later Haney reported, "This mission couldn't look greener."

He was back three minutes later to tell some 100 reporters and photographers that Williams exclaimed, "This is a beaut."

Shortly after the successful launch, Williams told reporters that the high point (apogee) of the elliptical orbit was 204 statute miles and that the low point (perigee) was 99.6 statute miles, with an orbit time of 89.27 minutes.

All systems, Williams said, were functioning "well within manned tolerances."

The world-wide tracking network was functioning "very well," Williams said.

The plan now is to send an instrumented, unmanned Gemini spacecraft into a ballistic path about 2,000 miles from Cape Kennedy into the Atlantic in August or early September. That spacecraft, unlike the one flown last Wednesday, will be recovered.

An expected life of 3.5 days for the first Gemini, plus or minus one day was predicted.

The only imperfection in the flight last Wednesday was a 14-mile-an-hour excess speed by the Titan II. It reached 17,534 miles an hour instead of 17,520. This sent the spacecraft into a 204-mile-high peak orbital path, 21 miles higher than planned.

Williams said this was well within tolerances and that on a manned flight, extra height easily could be corrected by the astronauts.

After the suborbital launch of the second Gemini, a manned mission with two astronauts aboard will be attempted in November or December.

William B. Bergen, president of the Martin Co., said shortly after the launch, "As an engineer, this was remarkable to me. Not one hold, it all went so well."

One of the country's newest astronauts, Richard Gordon, said shortly after the launch, "The only thing wrong with this one is that we haven't got a crew on it."

Williams told reporters that this successful launch "marks a milestone in the Gemini program and illustrates again the importance of America's space team, NASA, the Air Force and industry."

He told reporters that it would be some time before the information gathered from instruments aboard the spacecraft could be analyzed. These instruments measured heat, vibration and pressure.

On this flight, the second stage that powered the spacecraft into orbit remained connected to it. During a manned flight, the second stage would fall away from the spacecraft after burnout.

Williams, who directed all six manned flights in Project Mercury, bowed out of NASA with last Wednesday's launching. He recently accepted a position with the Aerospace Corp.

MISSION CONTROL CENTER-During a critical moment of the GT-1 mission are (from left) Christopher C. Kraft Jr., Walter C. Williams, and John D. Hodge.

Grissom, Young named as prime Gemini crew

Virgil I. (Gus) Grissom and John W. Young were named Monday as the prime crew for the first manned Gemini spaceflight which is scheduled for sometime in November or December.

The backup crew for the first manned Gemini flight will be Walter M. Schirra Jr. And Thomas P. Stafford it was also announced.

The four astronauts were introduced to the press Monday morning by Dr. Robert R. Gilruth, director, Manned Spacecraft Center, in the auditorium at the Clear Lake site.

During the question and answer period a reporter asked Grissom, "What do you consider to be the hairiest part of the flight?"

Grissom replied with this gem, "The part between the liftoff and the landing."

Grissom, 38, was the second American in space when he piloted his Liberty Bell 7 spacecraft on a suborbital flight down the Atlantic range on July 21, 1961.

Young, 33, is a member of the second group of nine astronauts that entered the space program on September 17, 1962.

Schirra, 41, was the third American to orbit the Earth when he made his six-orbital flight in his Sigma 7 spacecraft on October 3, 1962.

Stafford, 33, was also a member of the second group of astronauts entering the space program.

Virgil I. (Gus) Grissom **John W. Young**

Gilruth Center News

Hours: The Gilruth Center is open from 6:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 6:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Friday, and 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturday.

Sign up policy: All classes and athletic activities are on a first come, first served basis. Sign up in person at the Gilruth Center and show a yellow Gilruth or weight room badge. Classes tend to fill up two weeks in advance. Payment must be made in full, in exact change or by check, at the time of registration. No registration will be taken by telephone. For more information, call x30304.

Gilruth badges: Required for use of the Gilruth Center. Employees, spouses, eligible dependents, NASA retirees and spouses may apply for photo identification badges from 7:30 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Friday; and 9 a.m.-2 p.m. Saturdays. Cost is $10. Dependents must be between 16 and 23 years old.

Weight safety: Required course for employees wishing to use the Gilruth weight room. The next classes are scheduled for at 8 p.m. April 9 and April 23 (must be on time to receive credit for class). Pre-registration is required. Cost is $5. Annual weight room use fee is $90. Additional family members are $50 each.

Exercise: Low impact class meets from 5:15 p.m.- 6:15 p.m. Mondays & Wednesdays. Cost is $24 for eight weeks.

Stamp Club: Meets every 2nd and 4th Monday at 7 p.m. in Rm. 216.

Akido: Introduction to Aikido beginning classes start every month. Class meets Tuesday and Wednesday from 5:15 p.m. to 6:15 p.m.

Ballroom dancing: Classes for beginning and advanced dancers meet from 7-10 p.m. Thursdays. Cost is $60 per couple.

Country and western dancing: Classes for beginning and advanced dancers meet from 7-10 p.m. Mondays. Cost is $20 per couple.

Spring Intercenter Run: Competition will start April 6 and will end May 6. You can walk or run a 2-mile or 10K. The time sheet will be at the Gilruth Center. T-shirt orders will be taken at the Recreation office . Cost: $6 per shirt.

Ticket Window

The following discount tickets are available for purchase in the Bldg. 11 Exchange Store from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Monday-Thursday and 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Friday and in the Bldg. 3 Exchange Store from 7 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday - Friday. For more information call x35350 or x30990.

Moody Gardens: Tickets are $9.75 for two of four events

Space Center Houston: Adults, $10.25; children (4-11), $7. JSC civil service employees free.

Movie discounts: General Cinema, $5.50; AMC Theater, $4.75; Sony Loew's Theater, $5.

Astroworld Early Bird Ticket (valid through May 31), $18.50.

Astroworld One-day admission, $24.25.

Astroworld Season Pass (valid at all Texas Six Flags Theme Parks and Water World), $57.75.

Sea World adult ticket, $27.25

Sea World child ticket, $18.25

Stamps: Book of 20, $6.40.

JSC Picnic: 11 a.m.-7:30 p.m. April 5 at Astroworld. Tickets are $23.65.

Metro passes: Tokens and value cards available.

Coming Soon: Splashtown Water Park and Schlitterbahn Water Park.